

BOW-SHAPED SLAB

D. F. ATTENBOROUGH, *Clare*

ARNOLD was the cause of all the trouble. Gilbert and I met him at Helyg last summer, and although we had been there only once or twice before, we had already begun to appreciate the sort of things he did. On this occasion we had just arrived and he was telling us of all his latest exploits. It appeared that he had been on Clogwyn d'ur Arddu the previous day and had had to retreat from some climb called Bow-Shaped Slab, leaving in the process 150 ft. of rope draped over the cliff. Naturally enough he was very keen to retrieve it, if only because it was irreplaceable. He invited me to go up with him again, explaining that the rest of his party had returned to civilization the previous night. I jibbed a little at this, as apart from anything else it was the beginning of our holiday and I had not yet discovered whether I could still climb. He parried me by saying that he had to follow his friends home in three days' time and eventually it was decided that I should join him two days later.

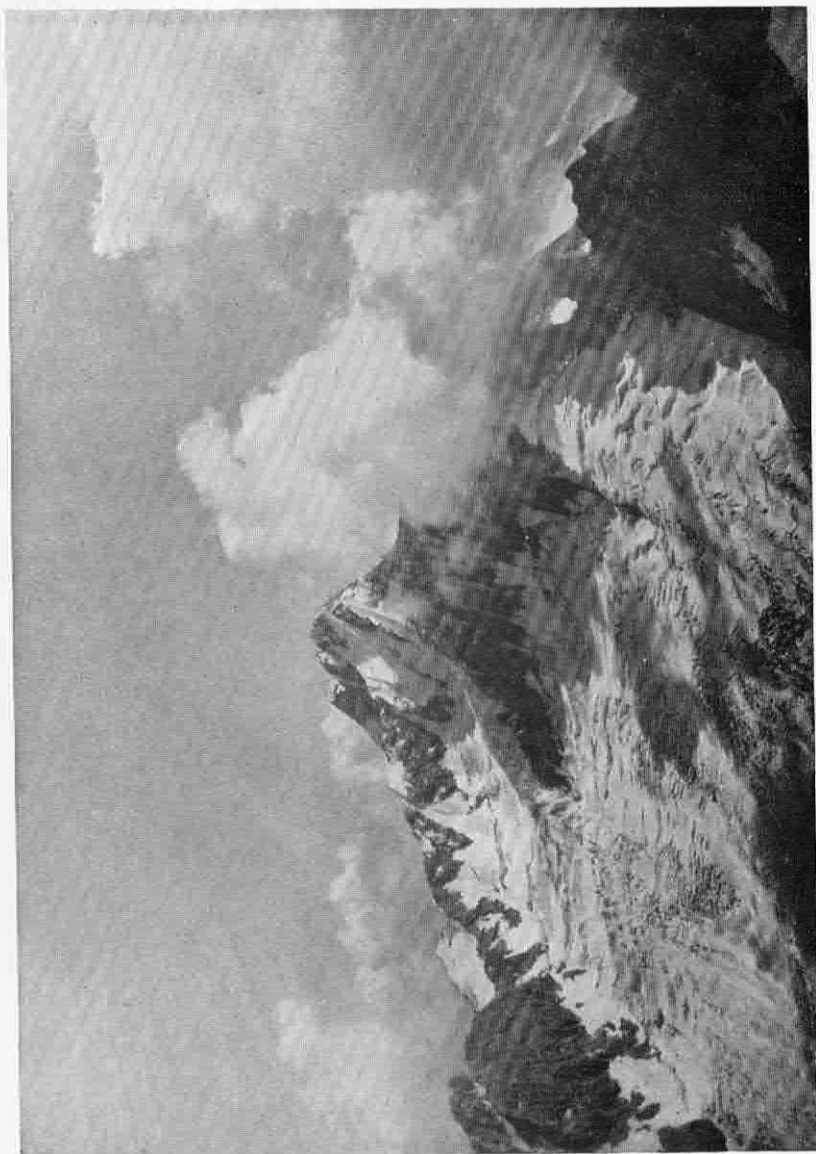
I have forgotten what Gilbert and I did the next day, but it was probably a very shaky re-acquaintance with Welsh rock on an easy Tryfan buttress. Arnold woke me the next morning at 6 o'clock for what he called an early start. I prepared some of the inevitable dried egg for breakfast, whilst he put together some sandwiches, and by the time we were on our bicycles I was just about awake. With the wind behind us we arrived in Llanberis, via Pen-y-Gwryd, in something like 2 hours.

Leaving our bicycles in the town, we started the walk to the cliff. The peaks were in cloud and the weather did not look too promising; by the time we reached that very welcome place of refreshment, the Half-Way House, it looked even worse. After some coffee, we started plodding across Cwm d'ur Arddu in the mist, spending a long time stumbling among the huge blocks, and nearly falling into the lake. Eventually we reached the bottom of the cliff, which was dripping in the mist. We had just decided that it would be unjustifiable to tackle the climb, when there was a sudden thunder clap and the rain came down as only Welsh rain can. That clinched matters, and after sheltering for a little while under the overhang of the West



TRYFAN

D. F. Attenborough



MONTE DESGRAZIA FROM CIMA DI ROSSO

G. A. Dummett

Buttress, we started back for the Half-Way House and coffee. A most miserable cycle back in the rain followed, and we got back to warm, dry Helyg in the middle of the afternoon. Indefatigable Arnold went off to do Great Gully solo in the rain, whilst I retired to bed with a cup of tea, feeling vaguely annoyed that I had not even set foot on the now much-discussed Bow-Shaped Slab.

Arnold had to leave the next day, and so the climb faded from my mind for a little. As the holiday progressed, I felt more and more tempted to have another look at it, and so a few days later Gilbert and I set out for Llanberis once again. This time we started at a more respectable hour, and with a real gale behind us we reached the Half-Way House by about mid-day. Over coffee, we tried to make out Arnold's abandoned rope which must have been flapping about in the wind something like 400 ft. up. The wind rather worried us, as a sudden gust blowing across an exposed part of the buttress would have very serious effects on one's balance.

When we got there, however, we found the crag relatively sheltered, and we had a short meal of sandwiches, dried apricots, and chocolate. The cliff looked steep and smooth, and rather frightening, which was perhaps partly due to the fact that it faces north and was in shadow. We changed into rubbers and had a look at the first pitch.

This was only 15 ft. long and appeared relatively easy, though when we got to it we found that the rock was not good. It led up to a small sloping ledge, floored with the slimy black mud that every climber knows so well. At the opposite and right-hand end, there was a fragile-looking ash tree and just beyond it the ledge petered out, to be followed by a very steep, slightly concave wall looking completely devoid of holds. We were relieved to find out from the guide that we were not expected to climb it in any normal fashion, though the method it recommended seemed only a little less frightening. The technique, it said, was to lasso a large belay on the opposite side and to swing across 10 or 15 ft. of sheer wall. Neither Gilbert nor I liked the look of it, but, tying ourselves securely to the ash tree, we tried to lasso the belay. After six or seven attempts the rope slipped over and we realized that there was now no excuse for retreating. Complicated arrangements were

next made with our two ropes so that when going over, we should be tied to as many things as possible. Unfortunately the ledge which we had to reach was rather higher than the one on which we were standing, making things more unpleasant than they would have been otherwise. We arranged a double rope around the spike we had lassoed and the ash tree, to swing across on, with a second rope for belaying.

On the grounds that I was lighter and therefore easier to haul back, I was told to go first. After much hesitation on the brink, I took the plunge. By much energetic pulling, I arrived in a very breathless condition on the other side, and belayed Gilbert as he came across.

The next part of the climb went round a corner on the right to join a crack, at least that is what "the book" said. When I got round, however, I found that a very unpleasant and wet-looking slab lay between me and the crack. There was not even the full ration of moral support, as Gilbert was out of sight behind the corner. I must have taken a very long time to cross it because, just as I reached the crack, Gilbert called out asking whether everything was well. I said yes, but looking up at the crack ahead, I was not sure whether I was right. It was steep and wet, with an overhanging wall on its right.

Although we were no more exposed than on any Tryfan buttress, the wall on the right robbed us of that sunny and airy feeling that gets one there, and gave the place a grimmer and fiercer look. It seemed at the time that the easiest way to get up the crack was to keep one's left leg outside it, and to try to get purchase on the infinitesimal bumps on the flanking slab. After 20 or 30 ft. it became wider and a little easier, and, having run out 100 ft. of rope, I belayed and brought up Gilbert. The next 150 ft. were of a nondescript slabby sort near the top of which we could see the rope that had brought us here in the first place. I went up and beyond it, leaving Gilbert to collect it, which he did; when he reached me he had it round his shoulder together with another rope, three slings, and a karabiner of our own. It looked an awfully heavy load to climb with, but as it turned out we were glad of every foot.

We ended up on a ledge with a belay at the back, which, though not what the pioneers would have called "on Nature's liberal scale", was nevertheless of quite substantial dimensions.

This was just as well, as the pitch above was the one which had defeated Arnold. The route traversed out to the left for 10 ft. and then turned up a 15 ft. wall. From there onwards it looked as though our difficulties would be over. We could see quite a nice line of holds beyond, which were sufficiently large to carry tufts of grass, and in addition the angle eased off.

The traverse proved to be even worse than it looked and ended on a long narrow ledge with the wall above. At the top of the wall, a horizontal crack provided an intermittent line of holds, but after much searching with hands and feet and eyes, the only hold I could find on the wall was one which hardly merited the name; it was just a very rounded bump on which no one could put a foot with any confidence.

I retreated to Gilbert to discuss the situation. It seemed so galling to turn back down 400 ft. of difficult rock with only 15 ft. between us and easier ground. It looked as though there was an easier way straight ahead, but this was so obviously the direct continuation that we felt that the people who first did the climb must have had a very good reason for not going that way, and as there was not more than an hour to sunset it was not the time to start experimenting. Whilst we were pondering over this, I noticed a spike, 10 ft. diagonally up to the right and almost on a level with the top of the wall. I went up to it, fixed one of our slings round it, and then clipped my rope on with a karabiner. With this running belay as an added safeguard I went across the traverse and had another look at the wall. It still looked just as impossible, but this time I had a belay, which although it was oblique was nevertheless above me. I felt sure that if I stood on the bump I could reach a hold which would solve the problem; at the same time I felt just as sure that if I stood on it for more than a few seconds, I should come off.

Warning Gilbert of what might happen, I stepped up on the bump. Sure enough, whilst I was groping about for handholds, my foot slipped and I pendulumed across the traverse to land unceremoniously at Gilbert's feet. Thinking I had spotted the crucial hold, I went back and had another try.

It had precisely the same result.

Gilbert, the more experienced member of the party, decided that it was high time we stopped fooling around and thought

about getting off the cliff before we were benighted. It was very disappointing, but the only sensible thing to do.

Arnold's rope had stuck so fast behind his belay that he had been unable to pull it down after him. So, having put a piece of turf beneath the rope at the back of the belay to prevent it happening again, we abseiled down. The next 300 ft. were quickly done, though our shoulders and thighs soon became very painful. When we reached the belay we had lassoed on the second pitch, we saw that we could not lasso the ash tree and do the movement in reverse, and so we had to go straight down. This provided a grand finish to the whole proceedings as it meant going over the overhang in a spectacular free rappel.

By the time we were both off the cliff it was dusk and dispiritedly we plodded back across the cwm to the Half-Way House. The genial proprietor met us with coffee and told us he had been watching us through his field-glasses, trade not being very brisk. He consolingly pointed out that even if we had not got up the climb we had at least got the rope for which we had set out.

The walk to Llanberis and the cycle to Helyg were very hard work and we were weary. It was after midnight when at last we walked into the hut. We told the rest of the people there the story of the day's doings, relating it as though it were the tale of a failure. I suppose it was, technically, but oddly enough I felt it to have been one of the most satisfactory days I had yet spent in the hills.



THE GUIDE

R. W. CAHN, *Trinity*

IN the summer of 1939, Jimmy and I resolved to have a last fling in the Dolomites. It would be a race against the gathering shades of war, we realized that, and so it had to be something really worthy of the occasion. Sure enough, as the train drew out of Victoria, Jimmy blurted out a crazy notion that he had been cherishing for years—to attempt the North Wall of the M***kofel. It was the sort of idea which could only occur to a man of Jimmy's calibre. I suppose a climber who has taken the Vajolet Towers, the Fünffingerspitze and even the Guglia di Brenta in his stride, who once kept up an average of two new climbs daily for a week, could dare to conceive of such a thing. As for me, I was very young; let that be my excuse.

In the train we fixed upon our plan of action. The M***kofel is in a remote district, and we knew we should have to spend a full day getting there from the hut near the Sella pass. We resolved to travel light and bivouac at the foot of the peak, to make an attempt over the next two days if the conditions were at all favourable; and to allow another full day for getting back to the hostel on the pass.

At Brixen we bought provisions and took the bus up the pass. We put up that night at the deserted hut, and set out early next morning for the M***kofel. Towards noon the great mountain appeared behind the intervening buttresses that had hidden it from view. Huge and threatening it towered above us, every detail of rib and cleft picked out clearly by the brilliant sunlight; I was suddenly reminded of the rippling muscles of a boxing adversary, with the decisive blow seeming to lurk within each one of them. The curious fancy kept recurring so that I hardly noticed the rate at which we were moving, and was almost surprised to find that by evening the base of the giant was close at hand.

We were already casting round anxiously for a suitable cave or overhang to shelter us for the night, when Jimmy gave a cry of astonishment and pointed up the dimly-lit valley. There, nestling under a boulder, I saw a little hut. To call it a shack